Observations From AP FRQ Readers

In 2010, I attended an AP Conference at Northwestern University. The leader of the conference had previously served as a “reader” (aka scorer) for the AP Government and Politics Exam. She shared some her observations and those of other readers with us. They are listed below.

**1. FRQ Writing is Content-Driven, NOT Writing-Driven**

* No need for elaborate writing or 5 paragraph structure
* Split your response into segments (organize)
* Don’t just spew words all over the page

**2. FRQ’s Are Scored, NOT Graded**

* Rubric only adds points
* No points lost for false/wrong information
* If a student labels different portions of their response as “a”, “b”, etc., then they may only receive points for section a in what they have labeled as section a in their answer. Avoid doing this.
* Normally the mean FRQ score is half. On 2009 Congress FRQ mean was 1.75/6.

**3. Pay Attention to the Test Prompt**

* As soon as you read the prompt, “mark up” the verbs
  + **Define**:
    - State the meaning of the word or phrase or give a specific example
  + **Identify**:
    - Select a factor, person, or idea and give it a name
    - Ex: Identify one example of incumbency – “One advantage of incumbency is…”
    - There is a trend of fewer prompts beginning with identify. Many begin with explain.
  + **Explain Why or Explain How:** 
    - Give a cause or a reason
    - Usually includes the word “ because”
    - Highest level of expectation – Connect your explanation back to the main topic
    - Ex: Why does the ability to perform casework give incumbents an advantage?
      * “By doing casework, such as helping a constituent get her Social Security check, members of Congress are able to leave a favorable impression on members of their district. This increases their chances of reelection ***because*** they are able to get positive result for the constituents, who will vote for them in the next election.”
  + **Trend**
    - A trend refers to a direction over time, not a single point or pattern on a graph or chart
* Try to estimate how many points each question is worth. Then, if you have time, go back and score your response to make sure you are meeting all requirements asked for in the prompt.
* Always restate the prompt question before answering the question

**4. Construct Your Response As If Your Audience is a Child**

* Pretend as if your audience is a five year old who has NO government knowledge
* There are NO points for implicit statements ONLY explicit statements
* No Pronouns. Never use pronouns. Write more exact FRQs.

**5. Vernacular is Key**

* If you use a buzz word, make sure you define it – remember, your audience is a child with no knowledge of government (i.e. beltway, divided government, spin, party in power, franking privilege)

**6. Concepts Are Key**

* In 2009, 3 of the 4 FRQs linked 2-3 units together.
* Students need to be prepared to connect two seemingly unrelated topics (ex: public opinion and the courts)
* There seem to be less FRQs on specific amendments or cases. Instead, they will give a clue or several choices. This means students do not have to learn “one more fact or case” right before the test.

**7. Avoid Inverse Reasoning**

* Answer the questions directly
* Don’t assume your reasoning is obvious or implied – it must be stated directly
* Be straightforward and clear – say what you mean, mean what you say
* Always “close the loop”
  + Connect your response back to the original prompt / question
  + Answer the “who”, “what”, “where”, “when”, “how”

**8. More Examples = Better Scores**

* Always hedge your bets by giving extra examples/explanations
  + - If it asks for 2 give 3, if it asks for 3 give 4
    - But be sure NOT to contradict yourself
    - Place each extra explanation in a separate paragraph to avoid confusion
* **EXCEPTION**: If the prompt asks for **MOST IMPORTANT** then only put one answer
  + When the question says “the most important reason” you can only put one answer. If you put two different reasons, even if one is correct it will not receive credit.

**9. Expect at least one of the four questions to measure non-linguistic data (Ex: chart, graph, political cartoon)**

**10. WRITE LEGIBLY!!!!**